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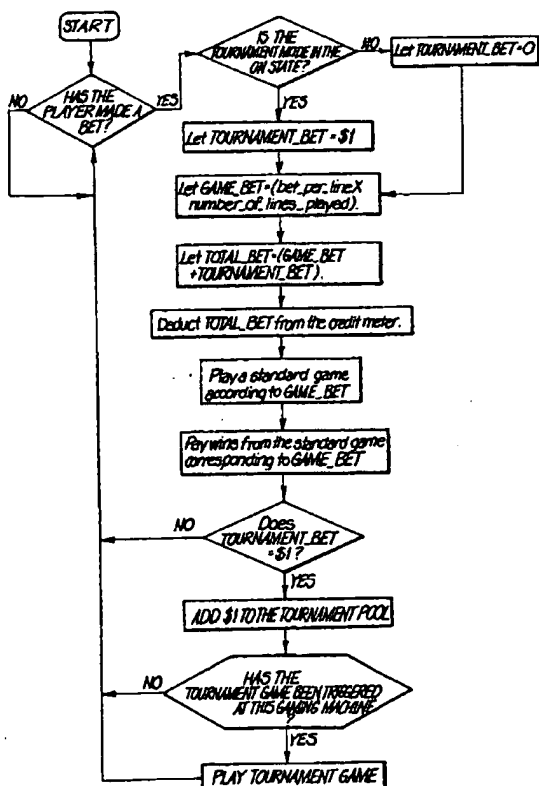
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(54) Title: GAMING MACHINE WITH ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPATION IN FEATURES



(57) Abstract: A gaming machine includes a display for displaying symbols relating to a base game. A controller, including a processor, controls operation of the base game and, optionally, a secondary event. A discriminator discriminates between wagers placed on the game to determine whether the wager is to be placed in respect of the base game or the secondary event.

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Gaming machine with eligibility for participation in features.

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a gaming machine of the type known
5 as a slot machine or fruit machine. Generally, these types of machines have
video simulations of rotatable reels while others are arranged to play video
simulations of card games or other types of wagering games, such as bingo or
keno. More particularly, the invention provides an improvement to a game
played on such a machine.

Background to the Invention

The concept of linked progressive jackpots is becoming increasingly
popular in the gaming industry where two or more gaming machines
contribute portions of bets made on base games to a central jackpot pool.
15 The pool is awarded to one or more of the contributing machines when a
specified triggering event occurs. As players become used to these types of
progressive jackpot arrangements, designers need to develop more exciting
ways of marketing and awarding the jackpot prizes in order to stimulate
existing audiences and attract new players.

As far as the applicant is aware, to be eligible for the reward of a
progressive jackpot prize, the game requires that the maximum bet be staked.
While this is by far the easiest way to increase total game turnover, which is
beneficial to the venue housing the machines, players not playing the
maximum bet are only eligible for fixed prizes as shown on a paytable of the
25 machine. These fixed prizes are much lower than the progressive jackpot
prizes and this places the player playing fewer bets at a relative disadvantage
with respect to the game's return. To compound matters, while players
playing fewer bets than the maximum bets still contribute to the jackpot
prize pool, such players are ineligible to win the jackpot prize.

Summary of the Invention

According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a gaming
machine which includes:

a display mean for displaying at least a base game;

35 a control means, including a processing means, for controlling
operation of at least the base game; and

a discriminating means for discriminating between wagers placed on the game to determine whether the wager is to be placed in respect of the base game or a secondary event.

5 The secondary event may be displayed on the display means of the gaming machine.. Instead, or in addition, the secondary event may be displayed on a display means remote from the gaming machine.

Also, the secondary event may be controlled by the control means of the gaming machine or it may be controlled by a central controller with which the gaming machine is in communication.

10 Hence, by means of the invention, a player can choose whether or not to participate in the secondary event or feature and, if the player desires to do so, a dedicated bet needs to be made to have access to the secondary event or feature.

15 Preferably, the gaming machine includes an allocating means for allocating an entire wager, placed in respect of the secondary event or feature, to a prize pool for the secondary event or feature. The allocating means may operate under the control of the control means. Instead, only a portion of said entire wager may be allocated to the prize pool with the remaining part of the wager accruing to the operator of the gaming machine as the operator's profit.

20 The discriminating means may be activated by an actuator. The actuator may be a selector button which, conveniently, may be incorporated in a keypad on a midtrim of the machine. In addition, or instead, the actuator may be in the form of an icon on a touch screen of the gaming machine.

25 According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a gaming machine system which includes:

30 a gaming machine comprising a display means for displaying at least a base game, a control means, including a processing means, for controlling operation of the base game, and a discriminating means for discriminating between wagers placed on the game to determine whether the wager is to be placed in respect of the base game or a secondary event; and

a dynamic prize pool associated with the gaming machine for awarding prizes for wins in respect of the secondary event, the dynamic prize pool being related to wagers placed in respect of the secondary event.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention is now described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a three dimensional view of a gaming machine in
5 accordance with the invention:

Figure 2 shows a block diagram of a control circuit of the gaming machine:

Figure 3 shows a button layout of a midtrim of the gaming machine of Figure 1:

10 Figure 4 shows a display screen with a discriminating means of the gaming machine de-activated;

Figure 5 shows a display screen with the discriminating means of the gaming machine activated:

Figures 6 and 7 show display screens of a tournament feature of the
15 gaming machine: and

Figure 8 shows a flowchart of a game played on the gaming machine of Figure 1.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

20 In Figure 1, reference numeral 10 generally designates a gaming machine, including a game, in accordance with the invention. The machine 10 includes a console 12 having a video display unit 14. The video display unit 14 includes a screen 16. Video simulations of reels or reel strips 18 are simulated on the screen 16.

25 The machine 10 includes an actuator 20.2. The actuator 20.2 is a button of a keypad 21 arranged on a midtrim 23 of the console 12. A player playing the machine 10 operates one of each of the buttons 20.3 and 20.4 (Figure 3) to be eligible to participate in a main game or base game of the machine 10. As will be described in greater detail below, the player playing
30 the machine 10 operates the button 20.2 to be eligible to participate in a secondary event or feature.

As illustrated, the machine 10 includes a top box 22 on which a score-card or paytable 24 is carried. The paytable 24 has two parts 24.1 and 24.2. The part 24.1 carries a paytable for the base game of the machine 10 and the
35 part 24.2 contains progressive meters relating to the secondary event or feature.

A coin tray 26 is mounted beneath the console 12 for cash payouts from the machine 10 either as a result of a win in the base game or as a result of a win from the secondary event or feature, or both.

Referring to Figure 2 of the drawings, a control system 30 is illustrated.
5 A program which implements the game and user interface is run on a processor 32 of the control system 30. The processor 32 forms part of a controller 34 which drives the screen 16 of the video display unit and which receives input signals from sensors 36. The sensors 36 are responsive to the actuator buttons 20.1 and 20.2 and also include touch screen sensors 36
10 mounted in the screen 16.

The controller 34 receives input pulses from a mechanism 38 indicating that a player has provided credit to begin playing. The mechanism 38 includes a coin input chute 38.1 (Figure 1) and a bill collector 38.2. If desired, the mechanism 38 could include instead, or in addition, a credit card
15 reader (not shown), or any other type of validation device.

Finally, the controller 34 also drives a payout mechanism 40 which, for example, may be a coin hopper for feeding coins to the coin tray 26.

In use, the player wagers a bet via the mechanism 38. The player activates the base game of the machine 10 by operating one of each of the
20 buttons 20.3 and 20.4.

The base game of the machine 10 is then played in the normal manner under the control of the processor 32. Any wins awarded to the player by the machine 10 are paid in the normal manner. Also, eligibility to participate in features associated with the base game, such as a free game series or second-
25 screen animated feature, occur.

The machine 10 prompts the player, for example, via appropriate icons on the screen 16 to participate in the secondary event or feature. For the player to participate in such a secondary event or feature, a dedicated, separate bet or wager needs to be made by the player. This can be effected,
30 once again, by applying credit to the machine via the mechanism 38. This may occur in response to prompts on the screen 16 to which the player responds via the touch screen. The secondary event may also be a spinning reel type of game. To activate the reels 18 on the screen 16 for the secondary event, the player operates the button 20.2.

35 When the player places a bet in respect of the secondary event, the total bet wagered in respect of the secondary event is added to a prize pool of

that secondary event, game or feature. Thus, the secondary event, game or feature may have its own progressive jackpot or other bonus features associated with it.

Referring to Figure 4 a display screen of the game 16 with the button 20.2 turned off is shown. As in the case of standard spinning reel games, the player selects a number of credits per line using buttons 20.3 followed by the number of lines to play using buttons 20.4. the operation of the latter of which will also initiate the game 16. A "Reserve" button 20.5, a "Collect" button 20.6 and a "Take Win" button 20.7 all operate as standard. The button 20.2 which is labelled as a "Tournament On/Off" button serves as a toggle between the state in which the player's bet contributes only to the standard game (ie. with the button 20.2 in its "off" state) and the state in which a part of the player's bet contributes to a progressive prize or some other tournament prize (ie. with the button 20.2 in the "on" state).

The player must switch the button 20.2 to the "on" state in order to be eligible for the tournament and a dedicated bet will be automatically taken from the player's credit meter in addition to the original bet whenever a bet is made with the button 20.2 in that state as shown in Figure 5 of the drawings. (Note for a progressive jackpot that is not a tournament the same would apply - ie there would be a "jackpot on/off" button)

When the button 20.2 is in the "off" state, the game screen is as shown in Figure 4 of the drawings. Games can be played in the standard way. The player will not be contributing any of his or her bet towards the tournament pool or progressive jackpot, and the player will not be eligible for the tournament feature or progressive jackpot.

When the player toggles the button 20.2 to the "on" state, the game screen is as shown in Figure 5 of the drawings. In the displayed example, the dedicated cost of the tournament is \$1. Hence, when the player makes a bet the total cost will be 10 credits (ie \$1) more than the standard bet that is placed. In this case the player is betting 1 credit per line on 3 lines plus the tournament - ie 3 credits bet on the game and 10 credits bet on the tournament feature. Hence the win for 5 X 10s of 150 credits will still apply as it would have if the tournament button 20.2 had not been on. The additional 10 credits will be added straight into the tournament feature pool or progressive jackpot pool stored at a tournament controller or jackpot controller 100 (Figure 8), as the case may be, to which a number of gaming

machines (those which would be eligible to participate if the tournament bet is made) are linked.

5 A tournament may be triggered in a number of ways. It could be from a combination on the base game of one of the gaming machines 10. a random trigger from the controller 100 (such as for a mystery jackpot) or a random trigger from one of the gaming machines 10. When the tournament controller 100 is notified of the tournament being triggered, a subset of the gaming machines 10 that are linked to the controller 100 and that are currently betting on the tournament (and therefore eligible) will be entered
10 into the tournament or progressive jackpot feature. This may be some kind of second screen feature, or may be completely independent of the gaming machine 10 (such as a single central display or a display for the gaming machine that is independent of the gaming machine itself). It may, instead, be tied into the base game of the gaming machine 10 such as a free game
15 series where the player who gets the most points collected over the free games will be awarded the progressive jackpot prize.

For example, as shown in Figures 6 and 7, a tournament may involve all eligible gaming machines playing 20 free games during which the number of bonus symbols 50 that appear on the screen of each participating gaming
20 machine 10 will be accumulated. The player who has the most bonus symbols 50 at the end of the free games will win the jackpot prize. If more than one player gets the same number of bonus symbols 50 accumulated over their 20 free games, then the progressive prize will be distributed among those players.

25 It will be appreciated that a player gains eligibility to the secondary event by activating the button 20.2 and eligibility to participate in the secondary event is unrelated to participation in, or a result in respect of, the base game of the machine 10, apart from the making of a bet in respect of the base game. Thus, should a player desire to do so, access to the secondary
30 event may be gained without necessarily having to make a maximum bet in respect of the base game.

Hence, it is an advantage of the invention that a feature is provided which enables a player to have access to a secondary event, which may also be a progressive jackpot event, without necessarily having to play the
35 maximum stake in respect of a base game of the machine 10. Not only does

this improve a player's chances of winning increased prizes, but it increases the turnover for the venue by additional bets being wagered by the players.

Another major advantage of the invention is that players who are not eligible for the secondary event do not contribute to the prize pool for the
5 secondary event. For most existing progressive jackpot systems, players must bet the maximum bet to be eligible for the jackpot and those who do not do so still contribute a portion of their bet towards the progressive jackpot. Thus, the present invention provides a fairer system.

10 It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

CLAIMS

1. A gaming machine which includes:
 - a display mean for displaying at least a base game;
 - a control means, including a processing means, for controlling
 - 5 operation of the base game; and
 - a discriminating means for discriminating between wagers placed on the game to determine whether the wager is to be placed in respect of the base game or a secondary event.
2. The gaming machine of claim 1 in which the secondary event is
- 10 displayed on the display means.
3. The gaming machine of claim 1 or claim 2 in which the secondary event is displayed on a display means remote from the gaming machine.
4. The gaming machine of any one of the preceding claims in which the secondary event is controlled by the control means.
- 15 5. The gaming machine of any one of claims 1 to 3 inclusive, in which the secondary event is controlled by a central controller with which the gaming machine is in communication.
6. The gaming machine of any one of the preceding claims which includes an allocating means for allocating an entire wager, placed in respect
- 20 of the secondary event, to a prize pool for the secondary event.
7. The gaming machine of claim 6 in which the allocating means operates under the control of the control means.
8. The gaming machine of any one of the preceding claims in which the discriminating means is activated by an actuator.
- 25 9. The gaming machine of claim 8 in which the actuator is a selector button.
10. The gaming machine of claim 8 or claim 9 in which the actuator is in the form of an icon on a touch screen of the gaming machine.
11. A gaming machine system which includes:
 - 30 a gaming machine comprising a display means for displaying at least a base game, a control means, including a processing means, for controlling operation of the base game and any secondary event or feature and a discriminating means for discriminating between wagers placed on the game to determine whether the wager is to be placed in respect of the base game or
 - 35 a secondary event; and

a dynamic prize pool associated with the gaming machine for awarding prizes for wins in respect of the secondary event, the dynamic prize pool being related to wagers placed in respect of the secondary event.

5 12. The system of claim 11 in which the secondary event is displayed on the display means.

13. The system of claim 11 or claim 12 in which the secondary event is displayed on a display means remote from the gaming machine.

14. The system of any one of claims 11 to 13 inclusive, in which the secondary event is controlled by the control means.

10 15. The system of any one of claims 11 to 13 inclusive, in which the secondary event is controlled by a central controller with which the gaming machine is in communication.

15 16. The system of any one of claims 11 to 15 inclusive, which includes an allocating means for allocating an entire wager, placed in respect of the secondary event, to the prize pool for the secondary event.

17. The system of claim 16 in which the allocating means operates under the control of the control means.

18. The system of any one of claims 11 to 17 inclusive, in which the discriminating means is activated by an actuator.

20 19. The system of claim 18 in which the actuator is a selector button.

20. The system of claim 18 or claim 19 in which the actuator is in the form of an icon on a touch screen of the gaming machine.

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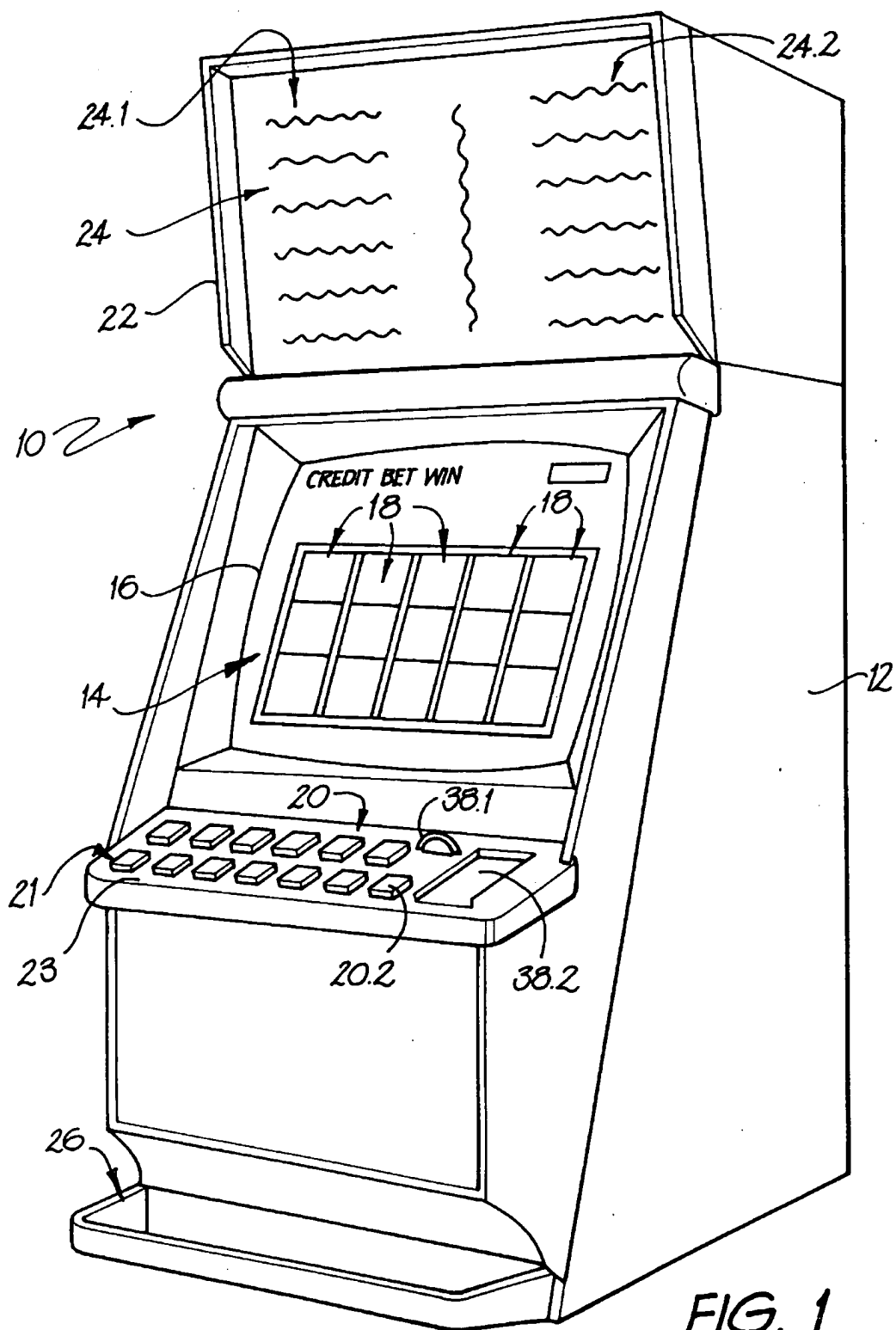


FIG. 1

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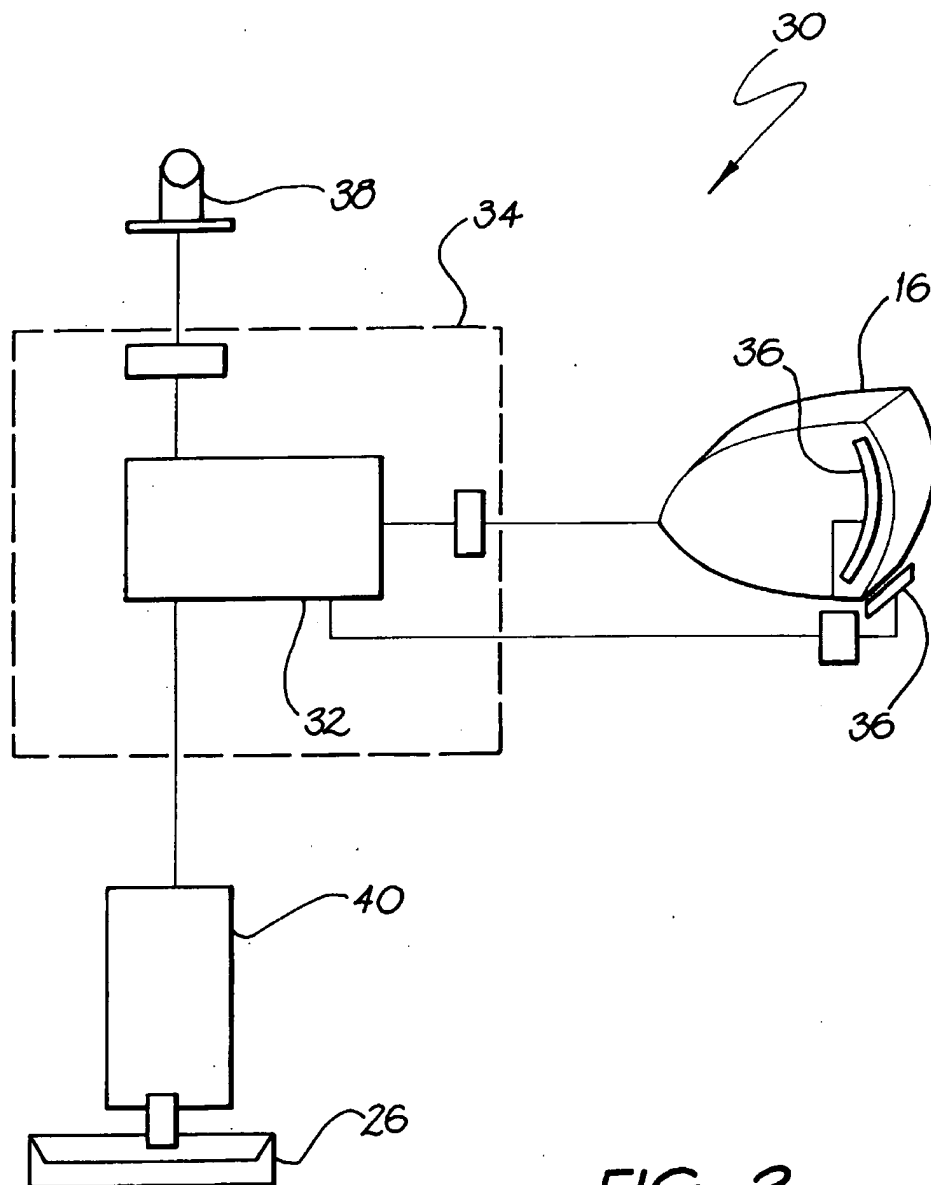


FIG. 2

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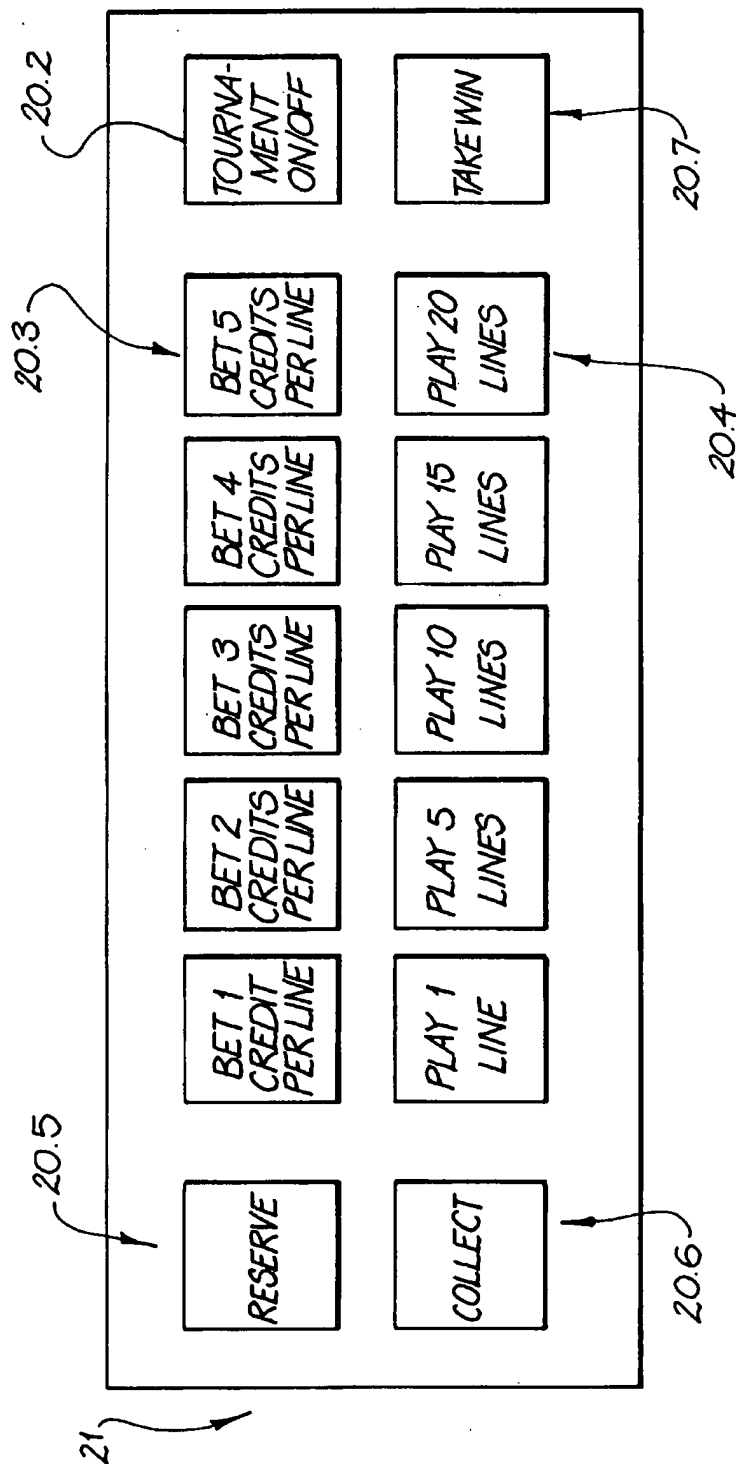


FIG. 3

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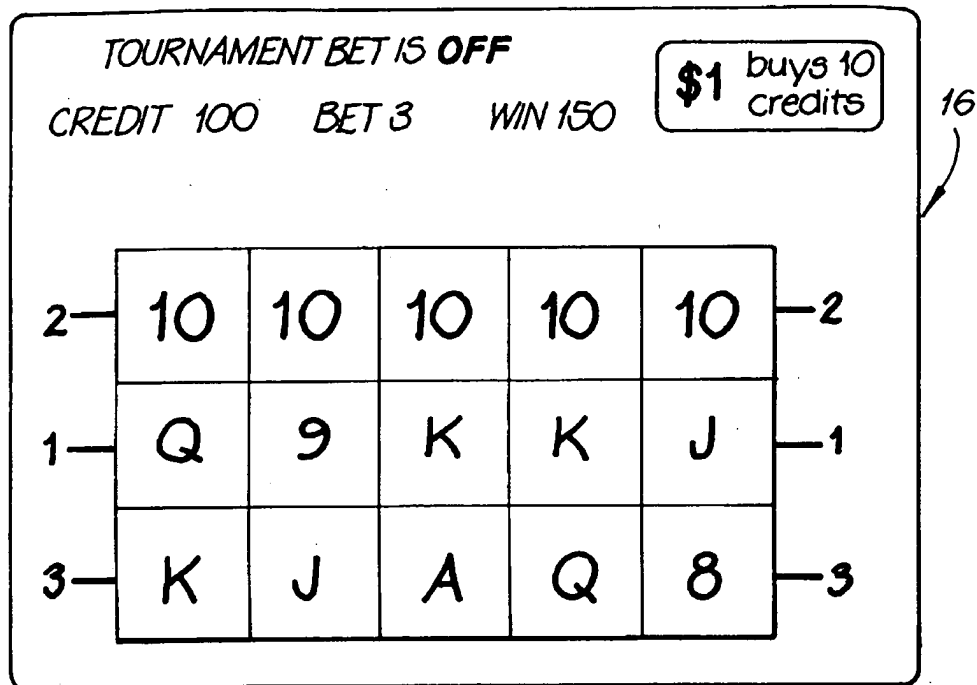


FIG. 4

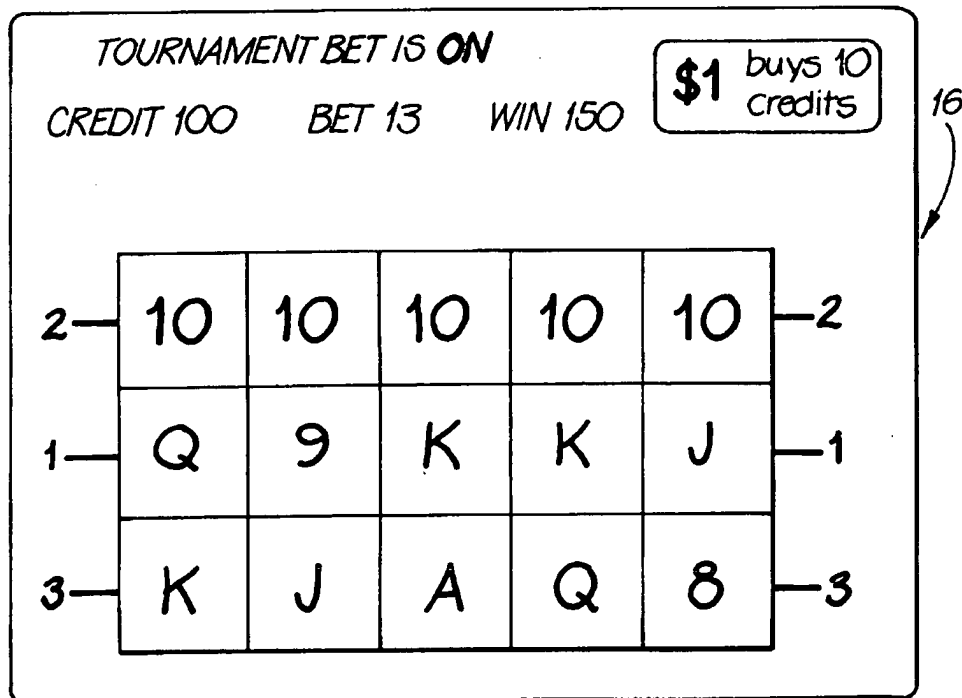


FIG. 5

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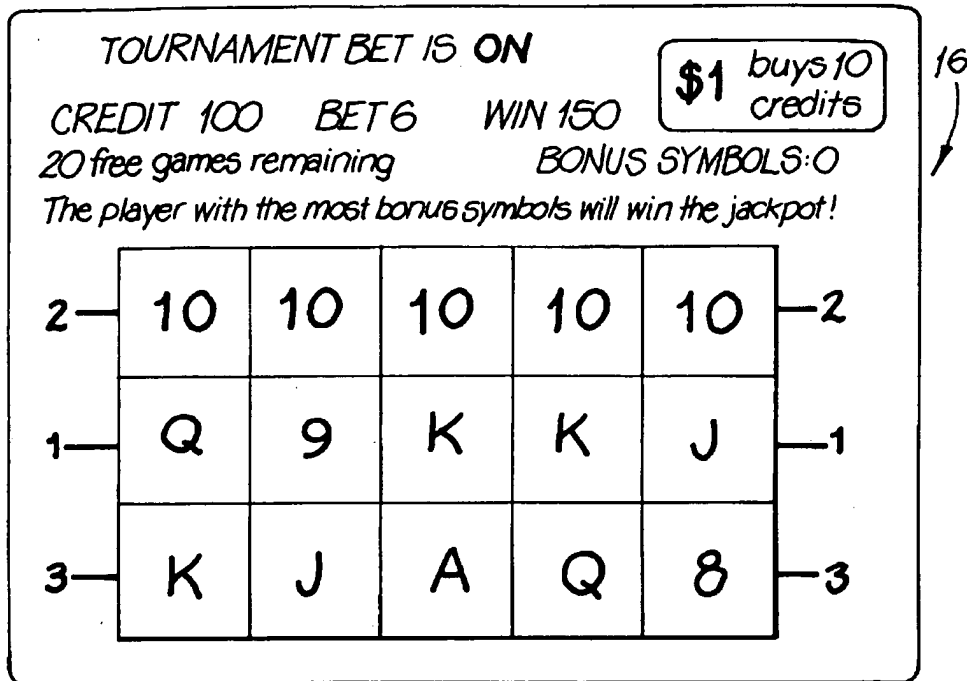


FIG. 6

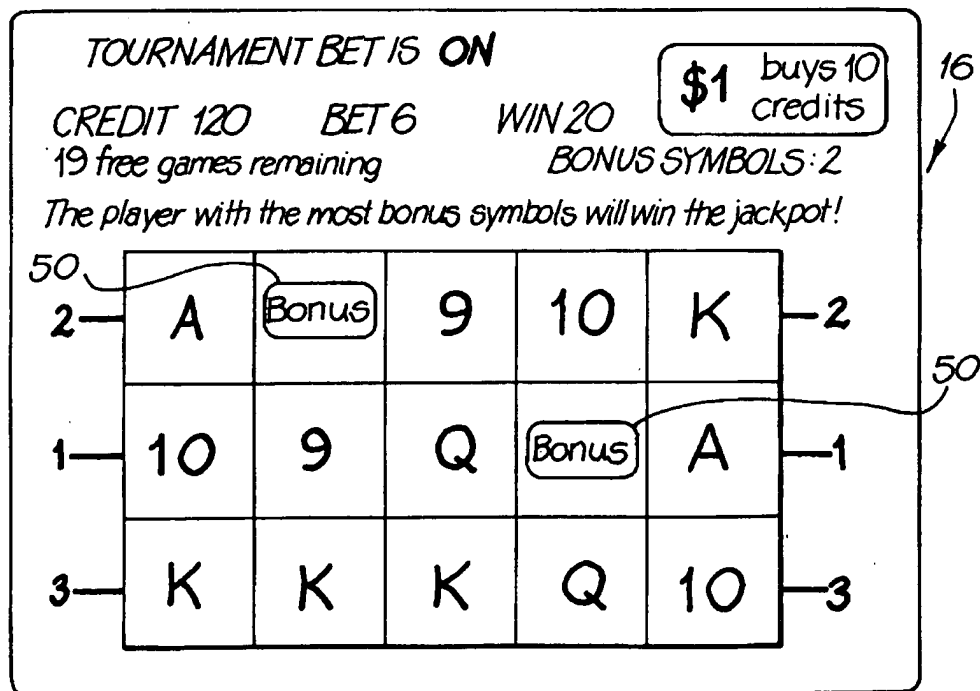


FIG. 7

6/7

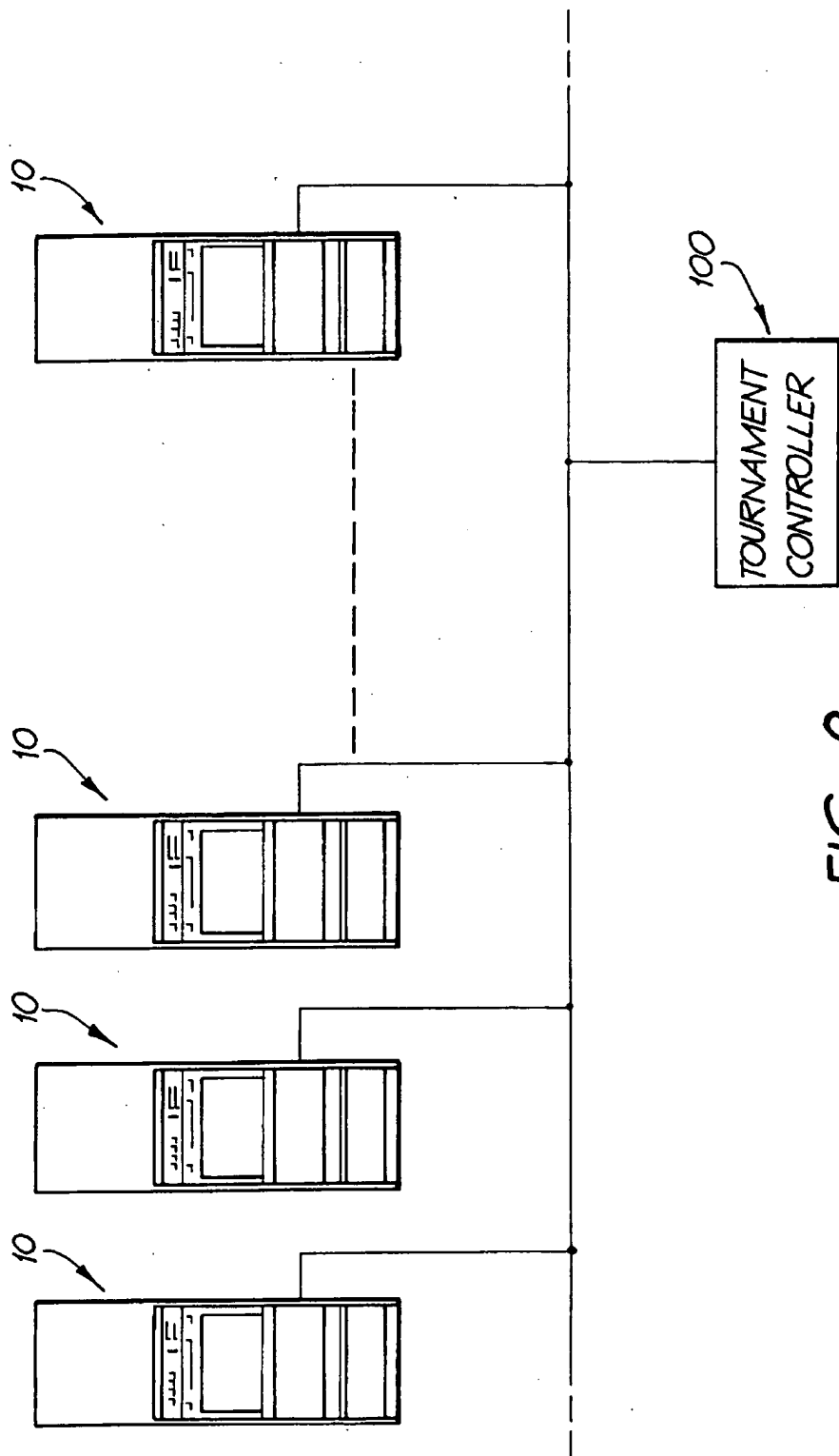


FIG. 8

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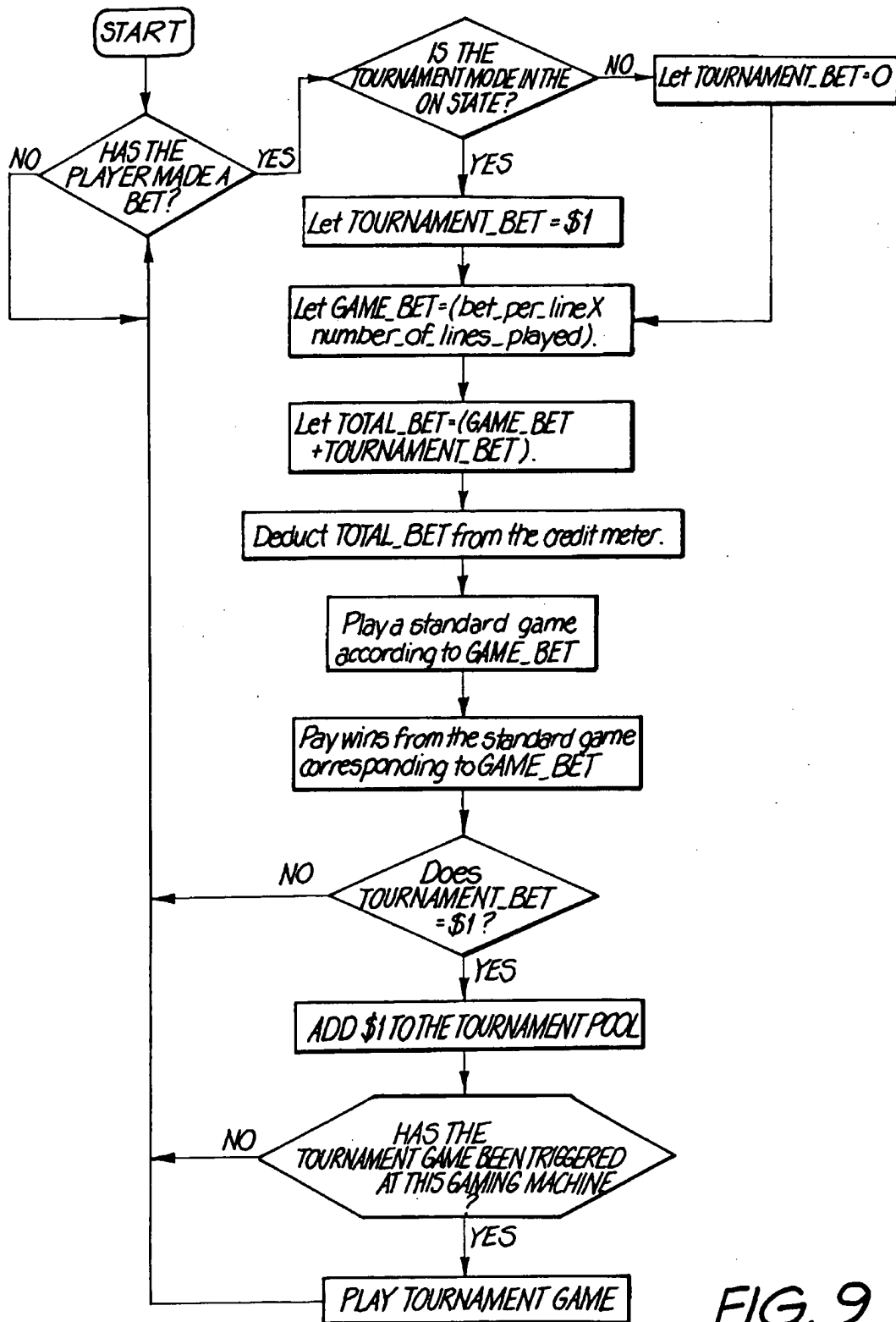


FIG. 9

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/AU00/01341

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER																						
Int. Cl. ⁷ : G06F 19/00, 161:00, A63F 5/04, 13/00, G07F 17/34																						
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC																						
B. FIELDS SEARCHED																						
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)																						
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched																						
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) WPAT, Esp@cenet, USPTO Web Patent Database, "slot machine, bonus game, side game etc"																						
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT																						
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.																				
X Y	AU,A,70382/94(CREATIVE ARRANGEMENTS PTY LTD) 17 August 1995 Page 3 lines 5 to 13, page 4 lines 13 to 15 and page 5 lines 11 to 17 in particular. In combination with WO 99/10849 below.	1,3,5-9 2,4,10,11-20																				
X Y	WO,A,99/10849(ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES PTY LTD) 4 March 1999 Page 4 lines 1 to 8, page 7 lines 7 to 25 and page 9 lines 21 to 27 In combination with AU 70382/94 above.	1,2,4-12,14-20 3,13																				
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex																						
<p>* Special categories of cited documents:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>"A"</td> <td>Document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</td> <td>"T"</td> <td>later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"E"</td> <td>earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date</td> <td>"X"</td> <td>document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"L"</td> <td>document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</td> <td>"Y"</td> <td>document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"O"</td> <td>document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</td> <td>"&"</td> <td>document member of the same patent family</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"P"</td> <td>document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			"A"	Document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention	"E"	earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone	"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art	"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&"	document member of the same patent family	"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		
"A"	Document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention																			
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"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art																			
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"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed																					
Date of the actual completion of the international search 27 November 2000		Date of mailing of the international search report 5 - DEC 2000																				
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaustalia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929		Authorized officer P. THONG Telephone No : (02) 6283 2128																				

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

International application No.
PCT/AU00/01341

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member	
WO	99/10849	AU	87937/98
END OF ANNEX			